

Mskodiismin [m sko diis min] (Bean) is Our Relative

The beautiful mskodiismin pictured below has its origins right here in our community and is called the Odawa Bean. Our friends at Ziibimijwang Farm are growing, harvesting and replanting the Odawa Bean seeds so that it can be available once again in sufficient amounts to nourish Little Traverse Bay Bands community members.



“The common bean (*Phaseolus vulgaris*) originated as a wild vine in Central and South America. Thanks to generations of Indigenous food growers cultivating beans over many millennia, there are thousands of varieties within the *P. vulgaris* species grown around the world today.”

“This diversity did not happen by accident; farmers selected the plants they liked the best and saved seeds from them, nudging beans toward heat tolerance, redness, frost resistance and more. They passed these seeds and knowledge down to their children and the cycle continued. So, every bean you see today is the work of thousands of people.” Many Tribal communities have mskodiisminak [m shko diis mi nak] (beans) that are particular to their area and growing conditions; in your travels you might get to taste Arikara Yellow Bush Beans, Hopi Tan Lima beans, Pawnee Shell Bush Beans, Zuni Shalako Bean or many, many other varieties. Many of these beans are not sold commercially, but eaten locally.

The incredible diversity of common beans encompasses many unique varieties—that seem anything but common—and a lot of the everyday beans you are sure to be familiar with include, but are not limited to, navy beans, great northern beans, black beans, kidney beans, cannellini beans, garbanzo beans (chickpeas) and pinto beans.

Food as Medicine: Sister Bean “Mskodiisminak are members of the Fabaceae family, commonly known as the legume plant family. One of the perks of this plant family is that they have the amazing ability to naturally increase nitrogen content in the soil, making the nitrogen accessible to other plants around them. In this way, beans do not just grow nutritious, delicious food, they help to enrich the soil in which they grow.”

“There are two basic kinds of beans: bush beans that only grow a few feet tall, and climbing (pole) beans that grow vines up to 10 or 12 feet long. The original native beans were all climbing varieties, but today there are more bush beans than climbing beans because people have bred the plants to stay short for the convenience of growing and harvesting.”

“There are many good reasons why it is important to revive the cultural tradition of growing and eating beans, and here are two important ones. First, the ceremonies, songs and stories of many tribes are linked to the planting and harvesting cycles of particular crops. Secondly, and even more importantly, is that beans are important in many Native American communities due to diabetes, a disease unknown to American Indians born before 1900.”

“The rise in diabetes in Tribal communities, and in people across the nation with American Indian heritage, can be connected to the abandonment of traditional diets. Beans are one of the ‘slow-release foods’ along with traditional corn, hominy, cactus fruits, camas, acorns, mesquite pods and roasted agave that are slowly digested and absorbed in ways that enhance insulin sensitivity.”

Mskodiisminak are a traditional protein complement to corn; they are rich in vitamins and minerals, and offer a variety of tastes and colors. Beans also contain soluble fiber which is helpful in the management of blood cholesterol and diabetes; their fiber is an important component for the health of the gastrointestinal system.

“Mskodiisminak are one of the “three sisters”; beans are planted and grown together along with the other two sisters, corn and squashes. They offer support for each other during their growing cycle and provide a very balanced diet of carbohydrates, proteins and vegetable fats to their cultivators. Corn stalks will support climbing beans planted around them. Because the beans are legumes, they fix atmospheric nitrogen (a necessary nutrient) into forms usable by the corn. The large leaves of the squash and its spreading vines shade the ground and help keep it cool and moist.”

For more information about growing a Three Sisters Garden, please visit: [How to Grow a Three Sisters Garden – Native-Seeds-Search \(nativeseeds.org\)](http://www.nativeseeds.org/How-to-Grow-a-Three-Sisters-Garden)

Sources: *Heirloom Seeds Our Cultural Past*, Natural Resources Conservation Service Louisiana Many Field Office District Conservationist E. John Rogers 1st Revision – October 24, 2011; [Where do your beans come from? - SeedChange : SeedChange \(weseedchange.org\)](http://www.seedchange.org/Where-do-your-beans-come-from?); [How to Grow a Three Sisters Garden – Native-Seeds-Search \(nativeseeds.org\)](http://www.nativeseeds.org/How-to-Grow-a-Three-Sisters-Garden);

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